

November 20, 2008
Fax (202) 514-2836

Registration Unit
Counterespionage Section
National Security Division
US Department of Justice
1400 New York Avenue, N.W.
1st Floor - Public Office
Suite 100
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Sir or Madam:

Enclosed please find a Press Release dated Wednesday, November 19, 2008 from the Kurdistan Regional Government US liaison office, Registrant #5783.

Sincerely,

J. Michael Slocum

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Kurds roll out red carpet for Hollywood

Drafts

By Charles Levinson, USA TODAY

All Mail

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq — Hollywood heavyweights traded Beverly Hills for the hills of northern Iraq last week to take stock of the region's potential film industry.

Spam (1)

The delegation from Hollywood was whisked around Kurdistan in armored Land Cruisers by bodyguards wearing business suits and earpieces.

Trash

On a winding mountain road, Sergei Bodrov, director of the 2007 film epic *Mongol* about Genghis Khan, stopped the convoy to scan the lush valleys below through his camera lens.

Contacts

Bodrov is reviewing a script about a South African who comes to Baghdad after the war to save the zoo, and another script about war photographers.

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For the Kurdish people who inhabit this region and were brutally oppressed by Saddam Hussein, Hollywood represents a powerful ally in their decades-long quest for independence.

Though the Kurds are part of Iraq, they enjoy a broader degree of autonomy than people in other Iraqi provinces, and have their own security forces and diplomatic corps.

As the U.S. prepares to draw down its forces in Iraq, however, some officials fear that autonomy could be in danger. That's where Hollywood comes in, said Najat Abdullah, the Kurdish cultural attache in Washington. "Hollywood can change the world," Abdullah said. "We need good friends around the world, because our situation in the region is not 100% stable. We need to let people know about our suffering, because we don't want history to repeat itself."

Labels

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Kurdistan extends across the borders of Turkey, Iran and Iraq, and Kurds have struggled against the three countries for independence. In the 1990s, Saddam used poison gas that killed tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds.

Among the Hollywood hitters visiting was Elizabeth Daley, dean of the University of Southern California's film school. She offered to host 20 young Kurdish filmmakers at USC for an intensive, three-month workshop.

Ted Mundorf, CEO of Landmark Theatres, came to help the Kurds build their first movie theater.

Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq has remained relatively peaceful since 2003, even as the rest of the country was engulfed by car bombs and sectarian killing. The skyline of Kurdish cities are dotted with construction cranes and new housing projects.

That's the message Abdullah hopes his Hollywood visitors take home. "Tell others who we are, what we want and that Kurdistan is a fine place to come and work," he said.

As Iraq's first lady, Hani Talabani, said, "Movies are the way we are going to make the outside world understand our story." Talabani, a former Kurdish guerrilla with a fondness for Audrey Hepburn films, hopes a major movie about the Kurds would have an impact the way *Schindler's List* did about the Holocaust.

The project started last spring over lunch at the tony Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills, when Hollywood publicist Stephen LoCascio received an offer unlike any he had heard of in 20 years. Abdullah wanted LoCascio's marketing firm to handle the Kurds as a client.

LoCascio's company has marketed famous actors, blockbuster films and major networks. But, like most people in Hollywood, he knew next to nothing about Kurdistan.

"Sitting in L.A., we think of Iraq as this desert wasteland with sand and heat. We hear about killing in the streets, and we understand that it's safer in the north, but how safe is that?" he said.

Still, LoCascio and his partner were intrigued and took the job. "This is flesh and blood and years of struggle, but at the end of the day, it's a marketing product," he said.

He called studio executives, filmmakers, producers and actors, asking if they'd like to go to Iraq. As word spread, "Everybody wanted to know can we go, how do we get in?"

The small contingent spent five days here, meeting with local officials and filmmakers, dining with Talabani and visiting a local arts school, where theater students performed a scene from *Hermet* in Kurdish.

"I hope this isn't my only chance to make it big, because I messed up my most important line," Shawkat Abdullah, 22, said after his performance.

As much as the Hollywood moguls in Baghdad found a common bond of press that their countries made, whether it be direct news reported from poison gas and genocide one minute to Hollywood gossip the next.

They found common ground. When the Kurds' foreign minister spoke about how Kurds were nothing like the Arabs living in the rest of Iraq, Hollywood could relate.

"California is like Kurdistan," director Badrov said. "We, too, are nothing like the rest of the country."

http://www.usstoday.com/life/movies/2008-11-18-IraqHollywood_N.htm?POE=click-ref

For more information please contact us@krg.org.

Kurdistan Regional Government

Representation to the U.S.

1634 Eye St., NW, Suite 210

Washington, DC 20006

(T) +1.202.637.2496

(F) +1.202.637.2723

www.krg.org

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